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WHAT IS “THE HEAD” IN LAWN BOWLS?

Firstly, let’s look at some terms. What is “the head” in the first place? The “head” is the area around the jack, wherever it may be. It is not limited to where the jack was originally placed, therefore if the jack moves during an end, the area known as “the head” will move with it.

There is no standard definition of how big of an area the head covers, but consider it in the region of a yard or so around the jack.

PRINCIPLES OF BUILDING A HEAD

Imagine “building the head” as setting the scene for the back end players to play their shots.

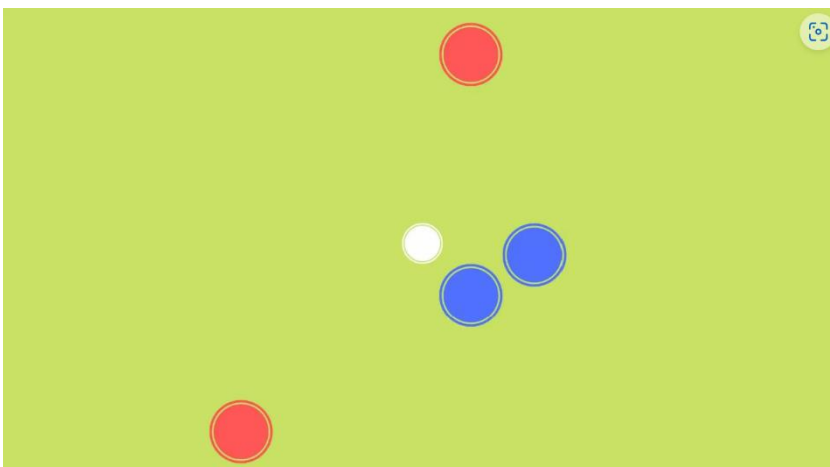
You are trying to provide your backend shots with the best possible situation, with options to attack and defend. In my examples I will use the example of a team of 4s, with each player demonstrating the different aspects of building the head. Here is the order you will look to do this.

Get at least one bowl close to the jack

This is the obvious choice. Your first shots should always be to get as close to the jack as possible.

The aim with the first few shots is to try and gain an early shot advantage whilst there are fewer bowls in play. As the end progresses and bowls start getting in the way you may lose the ability to draw onto the jack, so it’s important to take your opportunity whilst you can.

Of course, if you miss with your first few shots, you may end up spending most of the end on this part!



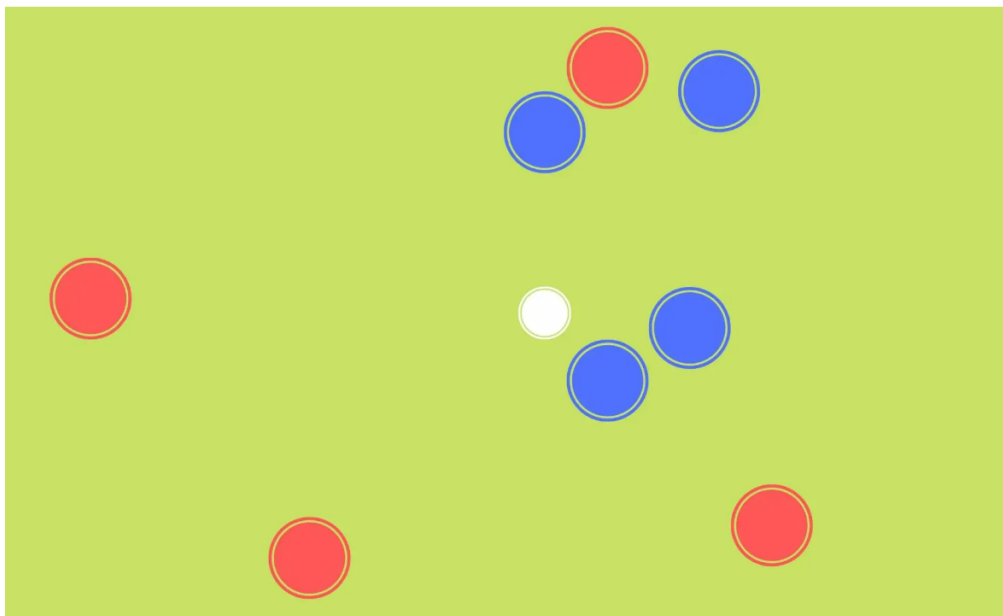
In this example you can see the blue team have placed 2 bowls near the jack, whereas the red player couldn’t. Not only that one of his shots was short, which doesn’t even cover any back position.

Get bowls in safety positions behind the jack

Once you have a couple of bowls near the jack it’s time to consider getting some bowls behind the head.

If the jack moves it's only going to go backwards, so getting something behind is important.

At this stage you will be looking to get your back shots either directly behind the jack, or covering groups of your opponent's bowls.



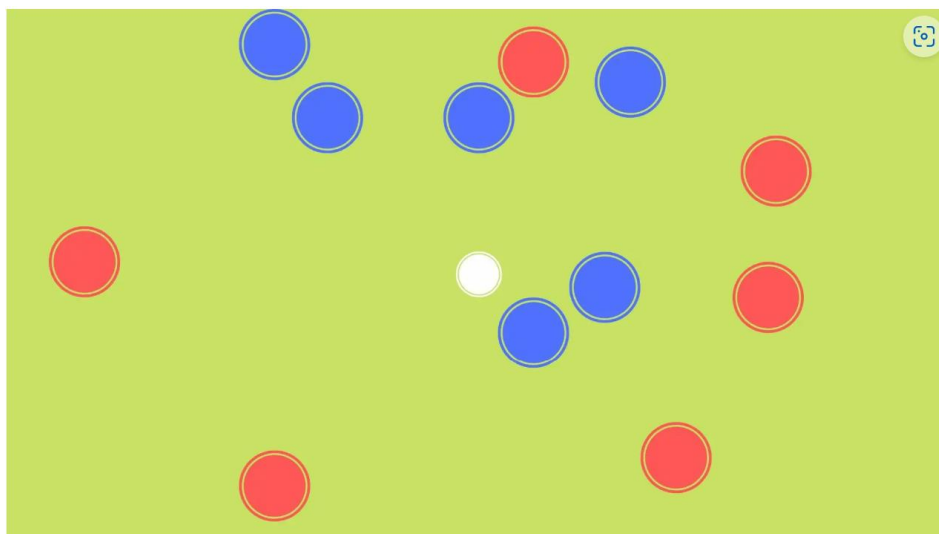
In this hypothetical end, the blue team have now got one bowl directly behind the jack, and another covering the red back bowl. More bad news for the red team as the second red player couldn't get their bowls behind the jack.

Get bowls covering where the jack is likely to move.

This could be included in the previous step, but as it's an important concept it deserves its own point.

You can predict where the jack might move. For example, if a bowl is in front of the jack, slightly to the left, you can be pretty sure that if the bowl is moved it will push the jack to the right. You want to place your bowl behind the jack in the area where it might move.

This is important, because the team who are down will likely try to play an attacking shot to move the shot bowl, or the jack. Therefore this tactic can be a defensive move if you are holding shot, or an attacking move if you are down a shot.

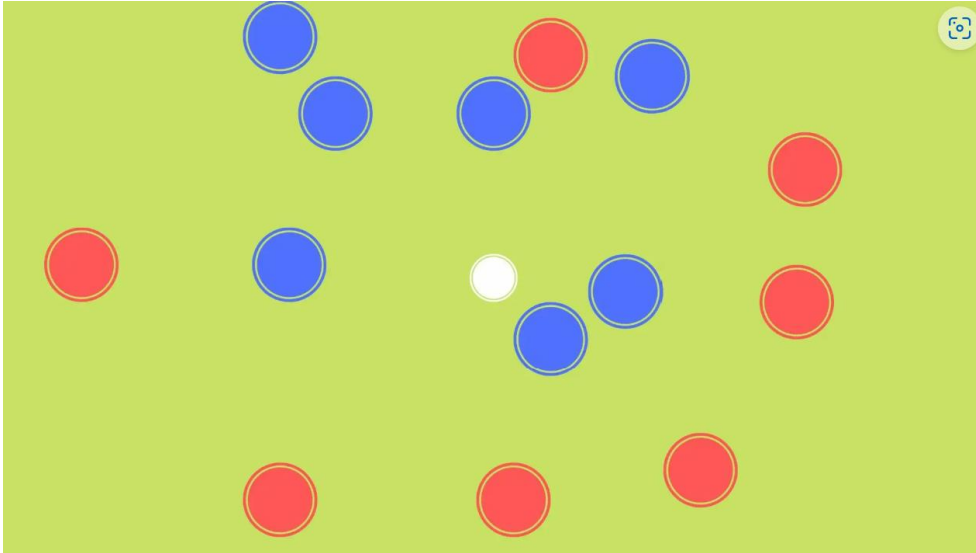


More good positional play from the blue team. As the shot bowl is slightly to the right of the jack, if it is hit it will likely move the jack to the left. The blue player placed two bowls in this area. In contrast the red player placed both of their shots on the wrong side of the head.

Give yourself options to gain shots later in the end

Finally, if you have covered all possible defensive positions, you want to get your bowls into positions to make more shots with the lowest possible risk.

An example of this is to try and get into a count without aiming to get right on the jack. If your opponent hasn't got a shot near the jack you can aim to get a bowl wide of the jack, but still within the count.



With their 7th shot the blue team placed a bowl to the left of the jack, still in the count but with little risk of moving the shot bowls. The red player placed their's short and in the way of an aggressive shot.

A GOOD EXAMPLE OF BUILDING THE HEAD

With one bowl to go the blue team have:

- scoring shots
- bowls covering their opponents back bowls
- bowls covering the likely location the jack will go

A BAD EXAMPLE OF BUILDING THE HEAD

In our example the red team was a bad example of building the head. They failed to get shots near the jack, and failed to get a good back position to give themselves a chance if the jack was moved

With one shot to play the red team are:

- down on the end
- few shots available to play
- little chance of getting lucky if the jack moves

Of course the red team skip could draw in for shot on the last bowl, it happens! But the blue team have done everything possible to give themselves the best chance of winning the end.

Bowls is a game of consistency, so the team who builds heads the best stands the best chance of winning in the long run.

Finally, it's important to note that building the head is only half the battle. Being able to read the head is a skill in itself, especially as you try to understand what your opponent might be doing, and how you may need to react to it.

Conclusion

Building the head is all about getting good position, both in terms of getting bowls close to the jack, but also in getting bowls in good covering positions.

It is an art, rather than a science, so whilst the steps in this guide are the foundations, you will learn over time where you need to place your bowls.